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## ABSTRACT

Oppressed people need to--and are currently trying  
to--obtain the power to define their humanity in their own terms.  
However, because it is easy for thrusts toward racial and ethnic  
consciousness to degenerate into racial and ethnic hate, it is  
necessary to define the ethnic self in ways that will not conflict  
with the needs of a world community. In searching for ethnic  
identity, one must achieve a world view which understands and  
appreciates the integrated set of primary, philosophical, and  
intellectual assumptions that bind humans together regardless of  
their ethnicity. Then, in a true search for self-identity, one is  
left with the basic questions about the universe, the earth, and man,  
for which George Washington Carver, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the  
N.A.A.C.P., among others, have sought answers. (JM)

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The Power to Define Self in an Age of World Citizenship

by

Jack L. Daniel

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You've taken my blues and gone  
and you fixed em  
so they don't sound like me  
but some day somebody'll  
stand up and talk about me  
black and beautiful  
and sing about me  
and put on plays about me  
I reckon it'll be me  
Yes It'll be me. 1

Langston Hughes poetically recognized that the power of one group of people to define the humanity of another group of people is fundamental to reinforcing and sustaining all forms of human oppression. Similarly, Haig Bosmajian also noted that

The power which comes from naming is related directly to the power to define others -- individuals, races, sexes, ethnic groups. Our identities, who and what we are, how others see us, are greatly affected by the names we are called and the words with which we are labelled. The names, labels, and phrases employed to "identify" a people may in the end determine their survival. 2

Through what Bosmajian calls the "language of oppression," oppressors attempt to "justify the unjustifiable" by defining Jews as "vermin," Blacks as "chattels," American Indians as "savages," and women as "chicks" and "babes." 3 Much of the oppressed's struggles, in turn, consist of efforts to recapture the power to define their humanity, and there occurs a crystallization of these efforts during times such as the decade of the sixties.

Leonard Kriegel noted that the sixties was a time when ".... In virtually every corner of the globe those who have been invisible to themselves and to those they once conceived of as masters now stridently demand the right to define meaning and behavior in their

own terms..." 4. More specifically, Kriegel noted that the Black, Indian, Mexican and Puerto Rican challenges were similar in that they all challenged "the very limited idea of humanity that the oppressor society grants its victims." 5 Thus we had the sixties upsurge of "Black is beautiful," and "Black power" which was followed by assertions of brown, yellow, and red beauty and power.

Despite the necessity for oppressed people to obtain the power to define their humanity in their own terms, the current world situation requires that we be ever so gentle with racial and ethnic consciousness since it is very easy for thrusts toward racial and ethnic consciousness to degenerate into racial and ethnic hate. Factors such as modern transportation, communication, technology in general, and the imbalance of natural resources, have made us so aware of the world community in which we live that our time might well be termed the "Age of World Citizenship." 6 Given this nature of our times, it follows that divisive phenomena such as fear of that which is different, prejudice, nationalism, the cult of the individual, oppressive language, and ethnic chauvinism must be minimized.

Observers of the current American ethnic consciousness are aware of some minorities' usage of oppressive language which characterized white Americans as "blued-eyed devils," "pigs," "honkies," "faggots," "whitey," and "the white boy." Even when such oppressive language does not come into play, it is also all too easy for myopic concerns with ethnic identity to cause "ethnic wheels" to be rediscovered, and, as is the case with such discoveries, to cause these newly discovered aspects of ethnicity to be imbued with a kind of uniqueness that eventuates in ideas of racial and ethnic superiority. Hence, there arises a question concerning how best oppressed racial and ethnic

minorities can positively define their humanity in ways that are conducive to the Age of World Citizenship's needs.

This paper is written for the purpose of discussing strategies for defining the ethnic self in ways that will not conflict with the needs of a world community, and will in fact facilitate self and ethnic identity. This will be done by focusing on Blacks' efforts to define themselves.

Regardless of whether the surface concerns have been with social, political, or economic matters, Black Americans' protest rhetoric, at root, has been concerned with individuation, that is, with the processes through which people define the intrinsic integrity of their beings, differentiate themselves from others, and determine how they relate to the rest of the world around them. Blacks have struggled to gain control over their processes of individuation as opposed to accepting definitions of their existence that have been forged out of Whites' and others' fears, ignorance, and rationalizations for their efforts to consign Blacks to the lowest level of human existence in America.

As the tides of oppression rolled in and out, Blacks sought to define themselves as Africans, African Americans, Colored People, Third World People, Negroes, Afroamericans, Black Americans, and Blacks as opposed to the savage Niggers lacking in intelligence that aspects of White American society incessantly attempted to make them. Blacks' efforts to define their humanity in their own terms reached such a degree of fervor during the 1960's that it was common to hear references to the "Black Cultural Revolution."<sup>7</sup>

As noted earlier, however, it is very easy for such race-consciousness to become the primary partner of race-hate. For years, the Black Muslims-Nation of Islam - referred to white Americans as

"blue-eyed devils" and "pigs." The decade of the sixties saw Black children attend "liberation schools" where they learned about the evils of the "honkey," "cracker," and the "white boy." Open references were made to "sissified, Jew boys." Jesus was termed a "psychotic," and white was defined as a mentality - "an anti-Black mentality" which all whites possessed.<sup>8</sup> Thus it was that for some Blacks race-consciousness became race hate. In accounting for the race-consciousness that eventually becomes the partner of race-hate, it is held that a primary contributor is a politically driven focus on the surface aspects of ethnic identity.

In response to problems related to things such as poor Black self-images, some Blacks sought quick devices (typically American, gimmicks) which would immediately feed self-esteem. Thus, we had the promulgation of the "top-ten, sugar-coated," abbreviated versions of Black American history in which individuals learned facts such as a Black sailed with Columbus and a Black designed Washington, D.C. Similarly, the glorious, golden empires of ancient Africa were described, artifacts displaying African aesthetics were collected, and individuals took on African names, African dress, and "Afro" hair styles. In short, many Black Americans adorned themselves with the surface aspects of culture, and, of equal importance, these surface phenomena were used for the purposes of political organization.

People such as Leroy Jones, Ron Karenga, Stokely Carmichael and hundreds of Black student leaders based their political organizations on some set of "African principles and motifs." The end in view was "the revolutionary struggle," and the cultural revolution was to be an initial step towards the political confrontation with the worst "imperialistic,



capitalistic, white, pig" that the world had ever known. Yet in the end, these politically oriented concerns with superficial aspects of race-consciousness failed to adequately serve Blacks' psychological needs.

I have stated before that the knowledge of the existence of magnificent carvings in Africa long before the time of Jesus Christ can do much for the raped ego of a Black American.<sup>9</sup> However, this knowledge is even more useful to Blacks if they also understand the world view which produced the carvings. World view is used here to call attention to the cultural, philosophical, spiritual, intellectual assumptions that a group of people share. In "structural" terms, world view constitutes the "deep structure" which is significant in generating surface structures such as artifacts, institutions, and behavior patterns. Thus, not only are Blacks and others better equipped if they understand the world view which generates their surface behaviors, but the needs of world citizenship can only be met when ethnic and race consciousness are developed with an understanding of world view.

In his discussion of "The Quest of an African World View," Fela Sowande clearly called attention to the need to begin with the "world view" portion of "African world view."

.... in the concept "African world view" it is the world view that is crucial, not African. For no consideration whatever can we afford to lose sight of this most vital point; otherwise, an intended quest for an African world view will surely and rapidly degenerate into a feverish hunt for a new ideological gimmick which can be used for questionable ends as political counters with the inevitable results of further intensifying race-consciousness as an ally to race-hate. In other words, there is but one world view, arising out of an awareness of the one consciousness that ensouls

that one life, the very essence of which is that indivisible organic unity within which the one humanity to which all of us belong regardless of race or creed or whatever constitutes a distinguishable but inseparable organic unity...<sup>10</sup>

Sowande has stated precisely what I believe to be the only way to define ethnicity during this current age. What must first be recognized is the one humanity to which he speaks. Ruth Nanda Ashen has stated this same proposition when she indicated the need for "intellectual and spiritual leaders" who:

"...are aware of the truth that beyond the divisiveness among men there exists a primordial unitive power since we are all bound together by a common humanity more fundamental than any unity of dogma; those who recognize that the centrifugal force which has scattered and atomized mankind must be replaced by an integrating structure and process capable of bestowing meaning and purpose on existence;..."<sup>11</sup>

But surely one might ask by now, then why do we need to consider ethnicity at all? Would it not be better that we ceased all efforts to emphasize race and ethnicity? Fela Sowande anticipated this question and provided an answer that seems patently applicable to this discussion.

How can we talk about an African world view? Ah, but we not only can, we must. For the African world view, which is sober fact constitutes the hidden treasure in quest of which we are most properly and meaningfully involved, is that world view of the fourth root race, that is, of the one humanity of the historical period noted above as covering from 5 million years B.C. to approximately 10,000 B.C. - that world view which is enshrined in African traditions, folklore, and mythology. But, in the first place, this is not the special preserve of the African or of peoples of African descent. Once you intend in your mind to compartmentalize the one humanity into this and that unrelated groups, you have ensured that with every step you seem to take toward your objectives, you are ten miles further away.<sup>12</sup>

The search for ethnic identity must be prefaced by a search for that "world view" which assumes the interdependent unity of all humanity.



One must come to understand the integrated set of primary, philosophical, and intellectual assumptions that bind humans together regardless of their race ethnicity. It is only from this understanding that ethnic identity can safely proceed. To do otherwise can't help but urge on some form of the biblical armageddon.

In the case of Black Americans, the quest for racial and ethnic identify must begin with a search for those primary assumptions that make up the view referred to by Sowande and Ashen. Then, Black Americans must come to understand the traditional Africans' rendering of the integrating structures and forces of the one humanity. But the Black American must go further. He must also tease out the precise reformulations of these African roots as they have been forged out of the American flames of institutionalized slavery and racism, and the rest of the American encounter. The truly Afroamerican genius must be understood as well as the original African and universal roots.

The age of world citizenship requires that we study all traditional renderings of the one world view which has flowed from the traditional peoples of the world. Once all realize that they are simply playing unique variations off basic themes, then all will realize the power potential of the concert which would ensue from the application of this recognition. However, one final note must be added if those seeking racial and ethnic identity are in fact seeking self-knowledge or self-identity.

The defining aspects of the traditional African world view, for example, are general, abstract, group characteristics, and as such, they will not completely satisfy the psyche of the Black American who

is in search of self-identity. Ours is a time of much "psychological mass-mindedness," and therefore those in search of self-identity often mistakenly seek self-identity through group appellations, i.e., Blacks, women, revolutionaries, Chicanos, etc. However, Carl Jung has reminded us that while they provide us with much needed knowledge, such abstractions are insufficient for understanding individuals.

"...if for instance, I determine the weight of each stone in a bed of pebbles and get an average weight of 145 grams this tells me very little about the real nature of pebbles. Anyone who thought, on the basis of these findings, that he could pick up a pebble of 145 grams at the first try would be in for serious disappointment. Indeed, it might well happen that however long he searched he would not find a single pebble weighing exactly 145 grams."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Jung argues that statistical "knowledge" must be put aside or at best kept in mind, when one seeks to "understand" the individual. Hence, mere knowledge of the traditional African World View or any other ethnic expression of world view is inadequate if what is truly sought is understanding of the individual self.

We will never find the exact prescriptions of any traditional view in any single individual since that view is but one abstraction of the complexities of individual lives. As abstractions, racial and ethnic identifications delete precisely those things which are unique to the individual, and, therefore, those things which are necessary for self-identity.

Many have naively believed that group identity was sufficiently potent for developing individual identity. Indeed, we have witnessed attempts to substitute the party, the company, the club, the class, the skin color, the flag, and the sex for individual identity. In all of these cases, however, we have seen the cracking of these group identities as the individual's identity needs presented themselves and arose in rebellion against the status of

"organizational man." Jung spoke to this insufficient nature of group identity for understanding the self when he noted that, "...Just as the addition of however many zeros will never make a unit, so the value of a community depends on the spiritual and moral stature of the individuals composing it."<sup>14</sup>

Those who wish to understand why the identity movements of the sixties have met with limited success would do well to study the extent to which the newfound racial and ethnic identities failed the individuals' needs for self-identity, and the extent to which they did not include the world view described earlier. Not having satisfied the needs of the world view or the individual, phenomena such as African dress, African greetings, baroque - "dapping" - handshakes, and para-military dress are receding as rapidly as they appeared.

Thus it is that mere knowledge of any ethnic world view and the adorning of its surface symbols are insufficient for the purposes of self-identity, and attempts to accomplish political goals based on such superficialities are counter-productive for the needs of a multi-colored, multi-lingual, technological, world community. Appropriate racial and ethnic identity must be based first and foremost on an understanding and appreciation of the oneness of humanity. Even then, however, group identity - racial and ethnic identity - is but an information narrowing device which can aid those young and lost souls in finding their way. For those few older souls who know who, what, and why they are, such group identity merely adds perspective.

Finally, if what is truly sought is self-identity, then I believe that one is left to wrestle with questions such as:

1. Therman; O'Daniel, ed., Langston Hughes' Black Genuis A Critical Evaluation (New York, William Morrow and Company, 1968), P. 26.
2. Haig Bosmajian, The Language of Oppression (New Jersey: Public Affairs Press, 1975), P. 5
3. Ibid., P. 9
4. Leonard Kriegal, "Uncle Tom and Tiny Tim: Some Reflections on the Cripple as Negro;" The American Scholar, Summer 1969, PP. 412-413.
5. Ibid., P. 413.
6. Fela Sowande, "Liberal Education for World Citizenship," in Toward a New Liberal Education, Experimental Studies Symposium, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, 1970, PP. 22-25.
7. See for example Leroi Jones and Larry Neal, Black Fire (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1968).
8. H. Clyde Halisi and James Mtume, editors, The Quotable Karenga (Los Angeles: U.S. Organization, 1967), P. 25.
9. Jack L. Daniel, "American Higher Education and Blacks Contributions to Its Future," Unpublished paper as an American Council on Education Administrative Intern at Stanford University, 1974, P. 36.
10. Fela Sowande, "The Quest of an African World View: The Utilization of African Discourse," Jack L. Daniel, ed., Black Communication: Dimensions of Research and Instruction (New York, Speech Communication Association, 1974), P. 111.
11. Ruth Nanda Ashen, "World Perspectives: What This Series Means," in Ivan Illich, Tools for Conviviality (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), P. 125.
12. Sowande, Op.Cit., P. 111.
13. C.G. Jung, Undiscovered Self, New York: Mentor Book, 1958), PP. 16-17.
14. Ibid., P. 40.
15. Sowande, Op.Cit., P. 47.

1. What the universe really consists of - what makes it tick, and why;
2. What the earth really is, what makes her what she is, and why;
3. What the constitution of man really is, and why it is that and not something else;
4. What the interrelationship between the universe, man, and the world of nature really is, how it operates, with what results, and why; and,
5. What is the pattern behind all of these, how does it work, and why does it work in that manner and not in some other manner. 15

These are the kinds of questions for which George Washington Carver sought answers. Harmonious answers to these questions were sought by Martin Luther King, Jr. The NAACP anchored itself to such philosophical origins, and this is a major reason for its survival. If we are to transcend the disorders of our times, and if we are to live in a peaceful Age of World Citizenship, then these are the kinds of questions for which we must find appropriate answers.